

From Identity to Emotion: The Institutional Production of “Being Chinese” in Hong Kong Schooling

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses how national belonging is constructed in post-2019 Hong Kong education policy through three official documents: the Citizenship and Social Development Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4–6) (2021), the Curriculum Framework of National Security Education in Hong Kong (2025), and the Values Education Curriculum Framework (2026). Drawing on a historiographical approach to critical discourse studies, it examines how presupposition and affective evaluation operate as key mechanisms in the normalisation of national identity. The analysis shows that deictic and possessive formulations such as “our country” presuppose students’ inclusion within a Chinese national collective, rendering belonging implicit and taken-for-granted. In parallel, affective lexis associated with pride, obligation, and moral attachment constructs an explicitly evaluative orientation towards the Chinese nation. The article argues that national belonging is produced through a combination of presupposed inclusion and affective alignment. It contributes to scholarship on discourse and education in Hong Kong by extending analysis beyond political speech to curriculum policy, highlighting education as a central site of identity formation in the post-2019 policy landscape.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis, curriculum discourse, national identity*

INTRODUCTION

In 2026, the Hong Kong Education Bureau introduced the Values Education Curriculum Framework (《價值觀教育課程架構》), which explicitly instructs students to “feel proud to be Chinese” 「以身為中國人為榮」 (Education Bureau of the HKSAR, 2026, p. 29). This marks a notable shift in the discursive construction of national identity within the territory’s school curriculum. Unlike previous frameworks, which emphasised knowledge, civic responsibility, or a general sense of identity, the 2026 document foregrounds emotional attachment as a pedagogical objective, positioning pride in Chinese nationality as an affective orientation that is explicitly cultivated through curriculum discourse. From a critical discourse perspective, this prescriptive language presupposes that students’ natural identification with the nation is insufficient and requires institutional intervention. The text thus constructs an affective orientation towards national belonging. It implies that deviation from the desired emotional state, whether local, hybrid, or critical, is a deficit to be corrected through schooling. This paper examines how educational texts seek to position students within particular subject roles by normalising certain forms of belonging while marginalising others. While this study does not examine students’ lived experiences through interviews or observations, it recognises that students may negotiate, reinterpret, or resist these subject positions according to their existing social experiences, cultural affiliations, and personal understandings of identity.

Hong Kong was a British colony for 156 years, from 1842 until 1997, during which time its governance, institutions, and civic culture were largely shaped by British administrative and legal frameworks. Despite its colonial status, Hong Kong was not classified as a non-self-governing territory eligible for decolonisation. In 1972, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) requested the United Nations to remove Hong Kong of such status under international law, though the United Kingdom affirmed Hong Kong’s position as a British colony. The removal of Hong Kong from the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories reflected the PRC’s position that Hong Kong’s constitutional status concerned sovereignty rather than conventional decolonisation. The path toward

decolonisation was later managed through bilateral negotiations between the United Kingdom and the PRC, culminating in the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984. The treaty outlined the transfer of sovereignty in 1997 and how China was to maintain Hong Kong's capitalist system, legal institutions, and way of life for fifty years under the principle of "one country, two systems". The Joint Declaration thus established the post-handover framework within which Hong Kong's historically developed institutional, social, and cultural experiences continued to shape debates over belonging after 1997. In this paper, the analytical question concerns how particular forms of belonging are discursively foregrounded, while alternative forms of identification are marginalised or rendered less legitimate within educational discourse.

During the colonial period, identities in Hong Kong were shaped by both British colonial institutions and local social and cultural experiences. Although the territory's legal system, public administration, and education operated within a British colonial framework, the colonial government generally avoided cultivating a strong sense of British national identity among the local population, in contrast to the broader cultural objectives promoted by organisations such as the British Council (Hampton, 2011, 2012). As a result, many residents developed attachments to Hong Kong itself, while cultural and emotional identification with Britain remained varied. This produced a complex and often hybrid sense of belonging in which local, colonial, and Chinese cultural affiliations coexisted without requiring exclusive identification with a single national community.

Following the handover in 1997, the hybrid forms of belonging that had developed during the colonial period did not disappear. Instead, Hong Kong residents continued to negotiate multiple and sometimes competing identities, including attachments to Hong Kong itself, Chinese cultural affiliation, and the territory's distinctive historical experience (Mathews et al., 2008; Mathews, 2020). However, the educational policy landscape of the post-2019 national security era reflects an intensification of state-led identity formation. The replacement of Liberal Studies and the subsequent emphasis on national security and values education occurred within a wider post-2019 reconfiguration of citizenship

discourse in Hong Kong (Wong, 2026c). In parallel, alternative legal and political frameworks of belonging have emerged (Iu, 2025a, 2025b; Yue, 2023).

These developments highlight the continued contestation and multiplicity of available identity and belonging frameworks in the post-2019 context. The present study situates this trajectory within its historical context, tracing the discursive strategies through which education policy constructs national belonging through affective language and presupposed alignment with the nation. It examines how such political transformations are linguistically and hegemonically constructed through curriculum policy texts that promote and normalise a singular narrative of national belonging. The significance of the present study lies not in determining whether students will ultimately accept or reject these constructions, but in demonstrating the linguistic mechanisms through which national belonging is normalised within contemporary Hong Kong education policy.

Curriculum Reform and Citizenship Education in Post-2019 Hong Kong

In 2017, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government established a Task Force on Review of School Curriculum with the mandate to conduct a comprehensive review of primary and secondary education curricula (Education Bureau of the HKSAR, 2020). The review covered the four senior secondary core subjects—Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics, and Liberal Studies—and produced six broad recommendations in September 2020. In November 2020, the government subsequently announced proposed reforms to Liberal Studies.

In response to public and media commentary, the Education Bureau issued a statement addressing concerns regarding the subject's implementation. The statement emphasised perceived issues in the existing curriculum, particularly its openness and flexibility, which it argued had led to inconsistent interpretations and implementation. It further suggested that excessive focus on current affairs, limited disciplinary grounding, and the perceived politicisation of classroom discussion had contributed to polarisation among students, alongside what it described as a misunderstanding of “critical thinking”

as indiscriminate opposition to authority (Education Bureau of the HKSAR, 2021). Although the statement did not explicitly reference the 2019 anti-government protests, it has been widely interpreted as situating curriculum reform within broader concerns about youth political participation and the role of Liberal Studies in shaping civic attitudes (Vickers, 2023). The statement attributes implementation problems to a “minority of people”, thereby presupposing that misinterpretation rather than structural or systemic issues contributed to the political tensions surrounding the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

Following these reforms, Liberal Studies was replaced by the Citizenship and Social Development (CSD) subject, introduced in the 2021-2022 school year. The new curriculum reduced contact hours, removed the Independent Inquiry Study component, and reorganised the syllabus into three themes: “Hong Kong under One Country, Two Systems”, “Our Country since Reform and Opening Up”, and “Interconnectedness and Interdependence of the Contemporary World”. In addition, mainland study experiences were incorporated as a compulsory learning activity, further embedding experiential engagement with mainland China within the curriculum structure.

The CSD Curriculum and Assessment Guide is structured into six chapters, covering curriculum rationale, framework design, planning, pedagogical approaches, assessment strategies, and learning resources (Citizenship and Social Development Web-based Resource Platform, 2021). Compared with the previous Liberal Studies framework, which was organised into broad areas including self and personal development, society and culture, and science, technology and the environment, the revised CSD curriculum places greater emphasis on national development and Hong Kong’s integration into the broader national context. For example, content previously situated under “Hong Kong Today”, “Modern China,” and “Globalisation” was reconfigured into explicitly nation-oriented themes that foreground “One Country, Two Systems” and national development narratives.

The post-2019 reform agenda extended beyond the replacement of Liberal Studies. In 2021, the Education Bureau introduced both the Curriculum Framework of National

Security Education in Hong Kong and the Values Education Curriculum Framework (Pilot Version). These initiatives were subsequently revised and expanded through the publication of the Curriculum Framework of National Security Education in Hong Kong (2025) and the Values Education Curriculum Framework (2026), reflecting the continued institutionalisation of national security education and values education across the wider curriculum. In addition, the introduction of the Citizenship, Economics and Society (CES) curriculum at the junior secondary level in the 2024-2025 school year extended civic and national identity education to earlier stages of schooling (Education Bureau of the HKSAR, 2022).

Relevant Literature

Research employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has long examined the relationship between language, identity, and political authority in Hong Kong. Much of this scholarship has focused on how competing understandings of political community have been articulated during periods of constitutional and social change. Among the most influential contributions is the work of John Flowerdew, whose studies demonstrate how political discourse has been used to construct particular understandings of Hong Kong and its relationship with the Chinese state. His analyses span the late colonial and post-handover periods, exploring topics such as the discursive representation of political values (Flowerdew, 1997), the ideological construction of Chinese identity (Flowerdew, 2004, 2016), and the use of patriotic narratives in public discourse (Flowerdew & Leong, 2007). Flowerdew's (2011) monograph provides a critical discourse historiographical account of changing political identities in Hong Kong, demonstrating how dominant political narratives developed across the colonial and post-handover periods. Taking this discussion further, Flowerdew (2017) analyses discourse surrounding the Occupy Movement and identifies recurring metaphorical constructions of identity that draw upon themes of conflict, confrontation, and warfare. This body of work collectively illustrates how questions of belonging and political legitimacy are embedded within linguistic choices.

The relationship between discourse and identity has also been explored from a range of complementary perspectives. Wang (2017), for example, investigates the construction of civic identity in official policy addresses, demonstrating how governmental discourse contributes to shaping understandings of citizenship. Ng (2020) examines the circulation and adaptation of Beijing's political narratives within Hong Kong, while W. Tang (2014) highlights the emergence of alternative forms of identification within diasporic communities. Although differing in focus, these studies share an interest in how language contributes to the production, negotiation, and contestation of collective identities.

Emerging scholarship has increasingly examined discourse following the implementation of the National Security Law. Existing studies have explored the discursive foundations of patriotism (Wong, 2025c), the representation of Hong Kong as an “internal affair” of the Chinese state (Wong, 2025b), and the linguistic strategies through which official narratives surrounding the 2019 protests were legitimised (Wong, 2024). Extending this line of inquiry, Wong (2026e) compares speech regulation in Australia and Hong Kong, suggesting that the National Security Law is shaped by narratives of historical insecurity and national vulnerability, while Australia's proposed framework assumes that competing political and cultural viewpoints can be accommodated within the existing constitutional order. At the same time, attention has been directed towards oppositional discourses, including protest slogans and symbolic expressions of resistance (A. Tang, 2022; Leung, 2024; Wong, 2025a, 2025d; Iu, 2025a, 2025b). These studies collectively demonstrate that language remains a central site through which competing understandings of identity, patriotism, and belonging are articulated.

Despite this growing literature, relatively less attention has been paid within applied linguistics to curriculum policy and cross-curricular education frameworks as sites of discourse construction in post-2019 Hong Kong. Existing research has concentrated primarily on political speeches, legal texts, governmental statements, and protest discourse. One exception is Wong (2026d), who examines the children's book series *Sheep*

Village and considers how the text might be taught in exile following its criminalisation in Hong Kong. Drawing on insights from the Critical English for Academic Purposes (CEAP) framework, the study extends discussion beyond adult language learners to younger audiences. Similarly, Wong (2025a) analyses “Glory to Hong Kong” and explores the pedagogical implications of engaging with political cultural texts in exile. Nevertheless, both studies focus on individual cultural texts and their educational implications rather than on official curriculum frameworks or education policy documents, which remain under-examined. This omission is significant because educational policy plays a central role in communicating officially sanctioned understandings of citizenship, national identity, and belonging to younger generations.

While previous studies have frequently examined ideology, sovereignty, and patriotism, few have investigated the linguistic mechanisms through which national belonging is normalised. From a pragmatics perspective, expressions such as “our country”, “love our country and society”, and “be proud of being Chinese” do not merely convey information; they position readers within a shared national community and presuppose particular relationships between the individual and the nation. The present study therefore shifts attention from political contestation to educational discourse, examining how post-2019 Hong Kong education policy documents construct and naturalise national belonging through affective language and presuppositional strategies. This paper asks: How is national belonging presupposed and expressed through affective language in post-2019 Hong Kong education policy documents?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a documentary research design and analyses three official policy texts. In contrast to interview- or questionnaire-based approaches, documentary analysis draws its empirical material directly from written records and institutional texts (Grant, 2018).

The article is situated within a broader doctoral project on political identity formation. Although the research originated as a TESOL project, it was subsequently completed under the discipline of Communication in 2026. Drawing on a historiographical approach to critical discourse studies (CDH), the larger project examines how BN(O) status has been recontextualised over time, shifting from a marker of British nationality into a symbolic resource mobilised in resistance to the totalitarian party-state's ongoing assault on Hong Kong (Wong, 2026a). This article represents a focused examination of educational policy documents within that larger investigation.

The broader research project also draws on Tibet's historical experience in exile to examine how political communities seek to preserve collective memory, civic practices, and forms of self-understanding under conditions of political displacement. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature on governments-in-exile (McConnell, 2009, 2016), theoretical discussion of the case for colonialism (Gilley, 2018), and visions of charter cities (Romer, 2009), the wider project considers possible institutional arrangements through which displaced Hong Kong communities might sustain civic practices and articulate alternative visions of political belonging in exile (Wong, 2026a; see also Wong, 2025d). This includes examining debates surrounding democratic government-in-exile, British constitutional legacies, and post-imperial responsibilities in shaping contemporary configurations of citizenship.

In the spirit of critical scholarship, the larger project provides a blueprint for alternative Hong Kong nation-building through the establishment of a British Crown Dependency model for Hong Kong in exile, alongside proposed formulations for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a referendum on Hong Kong's constitutional future (Wong, 2026a). These proposals seek to challenge the discursive effects of earlier political discourses and policy frameworks by imagining a new institutional and economic future through the creation of a parallel Hong Kong city-state under British sovereignty. Under this proposed arrangement, Hong Kong communities could develop alternative forms of political belonging and pursue innovation-driven economic strategies, such as digital

services, fintech, and international trade. The present article continues this critical tradition by examining the competing constructions of Hong Kong identity and political belonging within education discourse, highlighting how post-2019 education reforms institutionalise particular understandings of national identity and affective belonging through curriculum discourse and policy instruments. Rather than determining how curriculum reforms are received by teachers and students in practice, this documentary study examines how official policy texts construct particular representations of identity, belonging, and national attachment.

Consistent with the critical applied linguistics tradition, this study recognises that knowledge production is not value-neutral and that researchers inevitably approach texts from particular theoretical and epistemological positions. This article adopts a reflexive approach by making its analytical positioning transparent and grounding its interpretation in systematic engagement with the official curriculum documents examined.

Data Collection and Sampling Strategy

The data for this study consist of three official policy documents published by the Hong Kong Education Bureau: (a) the Citizenship and Social Development (CSD) Curriculum and Assessment Guide (Secondary 4–6) (Citizenship and Social Development Web-based Resource Platform, 2021); (b) the Curriculum Framework of National Security Education in Hong Kong (Education Bureau of the HKSAR, 2025); and (c) the Values Education Curriculum Framework (《價值觀教育課程架構》) (Education Bureau of the HKSAR, 2026). These documents were selected because they represent key post-2019 curriculum and policy instruments through which citizenship, national identity, and values education are formally articulated. All documents were accessed and downloaded from the official Education Bureau website, and only finalised, publicly available versions were included in the dataset.

The selection of these three documents reflects a purposive sampling strategy aligned with the research objectives of this study. Although the junior secondary

Citizenship, Economics and Society (CES) curriculum also forms part of Hong Kong's renewed citizenship education framework, the present study considers the CSD Curriculum and Assessment Guide together with the Curriculum Framework of National Security Education in Hong Kong and the Values Education Curriculum Framework to be sufficient. These documents collectively constitute the analytical corpus through which the study examines the discursive construction of citizenship, national identity, and the affective dimensions of belonging. The exclusion of CES, which began implementation at Secondary 1 from the 2024-2025 school year following the 2021 curriculum reforms, should therefore not be interpreted as suggesting that it is devoid of identity discourse. Rather, the selected corpus focuses on curriculum documents that directly correspond to the post-2019 restructuring of citizenship education and its subsequent cross-curricular institutionalisation.

The three selected documents represent complementary layers of curriculum governance. The CSD curriculum operates at the subject level, where national belonging is presupposed and developed through pedagogical discourse. The National Security Education Framework functions at a cross-curricular epistemic level, shaping how knowledge across disciplines is interpreted in relation to national security and identity. The Values Education Curriculum Framework operates at a cross-curricular affective and moral level, explicitly articulating emotional and ethical expectations of citizenship. This combination enables an analysis of how national belonging is constructed through a multi-modal policy architecture spanning presupposition, interpretation, and affective alignment.

Data Analysis

The collected policy documents were analysed using Flowerdew's (2017) Critical Discourse Historiography (CDH) framework, which examines how institutional texts construct historically situated meanings through recurring discursive strategies. In this study, the analysis focused in particular on presupposition, deixis, and affective evaluation,

as well as related strategies such as foregrounding and framing, in order to identify how national belonging is linguistically normalised within education policy discourse.

While many CDA approaches acknowledge the importance of historical context in discourse interpretation (e.g., Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Fairclough, 2010), Flowerdew's (2017) CDH framework is particularly suited to this study because it examines how discourse contributes to the construction and reinterpretation of historical meanings. For example, the changing significance of BN(O) status demonstrates how historically situated categories may be recontextualised through later political developments, acquiring new meanings in relation to identity, belonging, and sovereignty. Similarly, this study examines how curriculum discourse reshapes understandings of Hong Kong identity and Chinese national belonging through institutional narratives.

Within this framework, discourse is understood not simply as language-in-use, but as a historically embedded form of social practice that encodes assumptions about authority, legitimacy, and collective identity (Statham, 2022). This allows for an analysis of how apparently descriptive policy statements simultaneously function as sites of ideological construction, particularly in relation to citizenship and national belonging in post-2019 Hong Kong education policy.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Presupposed National Membership Through Inclusive Deixis and Bilingual Alignment

A central discursive strategy across the Citizenship and Social Development (CSD) curriculum, the National Security Education Framework, and the Values Education Curriculum Framework is the construction of national belonging through presupposed membership relations. Rather than explicitly negotiating or justifying affiliation with the Chinese nation, the policy texts repeatedly encode belonging as already established, thereby positioning students within an assumed national community.

This strategy is realised through different linguistic resources across English- and Chinese-language materials. In English-medium curriculum documents, inclusive deictic expressions such as “our country” function as pragmatic markers of co-membership, presupposing that the addressee is already part of the national collective. Such formulations operate as involvement strategies, reducing interpretive distance between the student and the nation and embedding identity within the grammatical structure of reference.

In contrast, the Chinese-language Values Education Curriculum Framework rarely relies on direct equivalents of inclusive English deixis. Instead, it constructs national belonging through culturally and affectively loaded expressions such as 「祖國」 (motherland), 「國家認同」 (national identity), and 「家國情懷」 (a fusion of familial and national attachment). Although lexically distinct from “our country”, these expressions perform a comparable pragmatic function by presupposing an inherent emotional and moral relationship between the subject and the nation.

Across both linguistic registers, national belonging is thus not explicitly constructed as an evaluative or emotional stance, but as a pre-given condition embedded in the discourse itself. The convergence of English deictic inclusion and Chinese culturally embedded national terminology indicates a shared presuppositional logic of membership across policy genres.

Theme 2: Affective Orientation and the Graduated Construction of Emotional Alignment

Alongside presupposed national membership, the policy documents construct national belonging through affective language that orients students toward particular evaluative and emotional dispositions. However, this affective dimension is not uniformly expressed across the curriculum. Instead, it operates as a graduated system, ranging from implicit developmental language in subject

curricula to increasingly explicit moral-emotional articulation in cross-curricular and values-based frameworks.

In the CSD curriculum, affect is primarily embedded in developmental and pedagogical terminology. Rather than directly instructing students to “love” the nation, the curriculum employs verbs such as “develop”, “enhance”, “strengthen”, and “foster” in relation to national identity, civic awareness, and belonging. Emotional orientation is therefore constructed indirectly, as an anticipated outcome of learning rather than an explicit behavioural requirement. Affect is embedded within the discourse of educational development, where national identification is framed as something to be progressively cultivated.

The National Security Education Framework marks a further intensification of affective orientation through its cross-curricular mandate. Unlike subject-specific curriculum materials, this framework explicitly integrates national security education into all learning areas, thereby extending emotional and ideological orientation across the entire curriculum system. In this context, affective expectations become more explicit and directive. For example, the framework includes formulations such as students should “deepen their understanding of our country’s development” (p. 9), “enhance their sense of national identity” (p. 9), and “learn to love our country and society” (p. 14). These expressions do not merely describe desirable outcomes; they function as normative directives that align cognitive understanding with positive emotional attachment. The combination of “understanding” and “love” is particularly significant, as it links epistemic alignment with affective orientation, suggesting that knowledge of the nation should naturally lead to emotional affirmation.

The Values Education Curriculum Framework represents the most explicit articulation of affective alignment within the policy architecture. In contrast to the developmental language of the Citizenship and Social Development curriculum and the cross-curricular directives of the National Security Education Framework, this

document directly foregrounds emotional attachment, moral orientation, and identity formation as central educational objectives. A key formulation in the framework is the expectation that students should 「以身為中國人為榮」 (take pride in being Chinese) (p. 29). This expression is significant because it explicitly encodes emotional evaluation as a normative requirement of identity. Unlike deictic inclusions such as “our country”, which presuppose belonging, or developmental formulations such as “enhance national identity”, this statement directly links national identity (“being Chinese”) with a prescribed emotional stance (“be proud”). The structure of the phrase does not present pride as optional or contingent, but as an expected orientation embedded within subject formation. More broadly, the framework situates such affective expectations within a wider discourse of values education, including references to national identity, civic responsibility, and affective attachment to the nation and society, thereby institutionalising emotional alignment as part of the desired ethical formation of students.

While national identity education is not unique to Hong Kong, its relationship with citizenship and belonging is historically specific. In many nation-states, civic education is situated within relatively established relationships between national membership and citizenship. Hong Kong presents a distinctive case because forms of belonging have developed through overlapping affiliations, including Chinese cultural identity-heritage, Hong Kong local identity, and British nationality. The existence of British National (Overseas) status, obtained through voluntary registration, illustrates the complex and plural nature of contemporary Hong Kong identities. The issue examined here is therefore not the existence of ideological education itself, but the extent to which curriculum discourse presupposes a singular and predetermined form of belonging, positioning alternative forms of national identity within Hong Kong as less legitimate. The non-recognition of BN(O) status in Hong Kong since 2021, for instance, reflects a hegemonic construction of

belonging in which Chinese nationality is positioned as the dominant framework through which Hong Kong residents' identities are interpreted.

Across these three policy layers, affective orientation is therefore constructed as a continuum of intensification. The CSD curriculum embeds affect within developmental language, the National Security Education Framework makes affect explicitly normative and cross-curricular through directives such as “learn to love our country and society”, and the Values Education Curriculum Framework articulates affect as a core component of moral and civic formation. Together, these layers demonstrate how emotional alignment is progressively foregrounded within the education policy architecture, moving from implicit cultivation to explicit affective normativity.

It is also noteworthy that the subsequently implemented Citizenship, Economics and Society (CES) curriculum at the junior secondary level includes objectives to cultivate students' “love for our country”. While CES falls outside the primary analytical corpus of this study, this formulation is consistent with the broader post-2019 policy orientation towards embedding affective dimensions of national identity across multiple stages of the curriculum.

Theme 3: Multi-Modal Policy Governance and the Institutionalisation of National Belonging

Having examined how national belonging is constructed through presuppositional discourse and affective orientation in the preceding themes, this final theme considers how these discursive mechanisms operate collectively across the wider curriculum architecture. Across the CSD curriculum, the National Security Education Framework, and the Values Education Curriculum Framework, national belonging is not constructed through a single instructional site but through a multi-modal policy architecture that operates across subject-based, epistemic, and affective dimensions of curriculum governance. Rather than forming a linear

hierarchy, these documents function as interconnected frameworks that jointly structure how students are positioned in relation to the Chinese nation.

These interconnected frameworks perform distinct but complementary functions in the construction of national belonging. The CSD curriculum provides the subject-level foundation through which national identity is normalised, using presuppositional and developmental discourse to position students within an assumed national collective. The National Security Education Framework extends this orientation beyond a single subject by providing an interpretive framework through which knowledge across learning areas is understood in relation to national security, sovereignty, and political identity. The Values Education Curriculum Framework further consolidates this orientation by explicitly articulating emotional and moral dimensions of citizenship, including formulations such as 「以身為中國人為榮」 (take pride in being Chinese) (p. 29). These documents demonstrate how national belonging is constructed not through a single curriculum intervention but through interconnected mechanisms that shape assumptions of membership, interpretations of knowledge, and affective orientations towards the nation.

National Belonging and Identity Formation in Post-2019 Hong Kong

The emergence of expressions such as “our country” within post-2019 education policy documents should be understood within the broader historical context of Hong Kong’s transfer of sovereignty in 1997. Prior to the handover, official curriculum discourse did not presuppose a shared national relationship with China, as Hong Kong was a British dependent territory. At the same time, Hong Kong historians such as Hampton (2011, 2012) and Mark (2020) have noted that Hong Kong lacked a strong cultural identification with Britain, since the colonial government did not actively cultivate a sense of “Britishness” among its residents. These conditions suggest that the contemporary use of inclusive deictic expressions

reflects a significant shift in the official construction of political membership and national belonging.

This shift is particularly noteworthy given the continued plurality of identity positions within Hong Kong society. While the policy documents analysed in this study presuppose membership in a Chinese national community, alternative frameworks of belonging remain salient. These include transnational, local, diasporic, and British-linked identities, especially in light of the United Kingdom's BN(O) visa pathway, which offers repatriation opportunities to eligible Hong Kong residents and their families. Studies such as Yue (2023) have found that Hongkongers in the United Kingdom overwhelmingly identify as "British Hongkonger" (p. 5), despite the colonial government having made little effort to cultivate identification with Britain. The persistence of multiple reference communities underscores the discursive significance of formulations such as "our country", which present a single national affiliation as self-evident and unproblematic.

The findings further suggest that identity construction within the policy architecture operates not through overt argumentation, but through presupposition and affective alignment embedded across curricular discourse. Rather than engaging competing understandings of national membership or leaving open the question of which "nation" is being invoked, the documents position students within a pre-constituted national collective and cultivate affective orientations that render this affiliation naturalised and self-evident. In doing so, they define the boundaries of legitimate citizenship by pre-structuring the conditions under which belonging can be recognised, articulated, and accepted as meaningful. Identity formation thus emerges less as a matter of choice or deliberation than as a process of constrained intelligibility, in which alternative civic and national imaginaries are rendered marginal or absent within the discursive field. In this respect, the curriculum framework participates in the

systematic production of national subjectivities through forms of discursive governance embedded in educational policy.

The findings should be situated within a longer historical trajectory of sovereignty and identity formation in Hong Kong. During the Sino-British negotiations, Chinese leaders consistently asserted that questions relating to Hong Kong fell within China's sovereign domain, reflecting a flawed understanding of sovereignty and their hegemonic assumptions (Wong, 2025a). These essentialising assumptions contributed to the Chinese state's discursive construction of Hong Kong residents as "Chinese" in the Sino-British Joint Declaration. In contrast, British negotiators emphasised safeguarding Hongkongers' nationality and political rights, notably through the introduction of BN(O) status, whose significance was realised in 2021 with the introduction of a BN(O) visa pathway, which has enabled an estimated 5.4 million Hongkongers to seek relocation, settlement, and, ultimately, full British citizenship.

This open door represents a correction of a historical decision during the Thatcher era, when the United Kingdom government granted British citizenship to 50,000 Hong Kong households in response to the Tienanmen Square Massacre, among whom were civil servants and other public figures. However, some beneficiaries have adopted positions that diverge from the liberal democratic principles historically associated with British citizenship. Carrie Lam, who, as Chief Executive, oversaw the promulgation and implementation of the National Security Law, instead acted as a quisling in service of the interests of the totalitarian party-state in Beijing (Wong, 2026b). The introduction of the National Security Law, which violated the commitments contained in the Sino-British Joint Declaration, formed part of the broader developments that prompted the British government to establish the bespoke BN(O) pathway. The education reforms in the post-2019 national security era thus exemplify a broader historical trajectory through which

Hong Kong has been forcibly and discursively integrated into the national framework of the PRC.

The continuing significance of BN(O) status also demonstrates the persistence of alternative forms of belonging among Hong Kong residents. As Yue (2023) indicates, the overwhelming majority of BN(O) applicants did not identify as Chinese, suggesting that the pathway represented not merely a migration opportunity but also a form of legal and symbolic affiliation for individuals whose identities were not encompassed by Chinese national identification. Yue's report is consistent with earlier findings in the pragmatics literature indicating that Hong Kong people do not "identify themselves as simply 'Chinese'" (Flowerdew, 2004, p. 1576). In this sense, the BN(O) pathway highlights the disjuncture between the Chinese totalitarian state's assumption of a singular national identity and the plural forms of belonging articulated by Hong Kong society.

The repeated emphasis on Chinese national identity within education and political discourse also reveals that such identification cannot be assumed as a naturally occurring or uncontested condition. If Chinese identity were self-evidently accepted among Hong Kong residents, the continual institutional reinforcement of formulations such as "being Chinese" and "love our country" would be unnecessary. Rather, the reiteration of these expressions suggests an "attempt to naturalise the myths" created through political discourse surrounding national identity and belonging (Flowerdew, 2004, p. 1565). In this sense, the discourse does not merely reflect an existing consensus but participates in the ongoing construction of national belonging.

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

This paper has shown that national belonging in post-2019 Hong Kong education policy documents is constructed through a combination of presuppositional and affective linguistic strategies. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis, the study demonstrates that inclusive deictic expressions such as "our

country” function to presuppose students’ membership within a Chinese national collective, while affective formulations, including expressions of national pride and 「以身為中國人為榮」 (take pride in being Chinese), explicitly orient students toward positive emotional alignment with that collective.

The analysis further shows that these mechanisms are distributed across a multi-layered policy architecture. At the level of the Citizenship and Social Development curriculum, belonging is primarily presupposed and normalised through deictic inclusion and developmental language. At the cross-curricular level, the National Security Education Framework extends this orientation by embedding interpretive and affective expectations across subject areas, including explicit directives linking knowledge and emotional alignment. At the level of the Values Education Curriculum Framework, affective alignment is most explicitly articulated through moral and emotional formulations of identity and belonging.

These findings indicate that post-2019 Hong Kong education constructs national belonging not through reasoned debate but via presuppositional cues and affective alignment embedded across policy documents. National identity is presented as a pre-existing, unquestionable norm, leaving minimal room for contestation. Curriculum, national security education, and values frameworks collectively normalise state-sanctioned identities, actively erasing alternative affiliations such as Hongkongers’ BN(O) status under the Sino-British Joint Declaration and distorting historical realities. The curriculum thus operates as an instrument of ideological domination, contributing to the systematic assault on Hong Kong’s civic and cultural identity cultivated under British colonial rule.

The National Security Law, which asserts its purpose as safeguarding the sovereignty, unification, and territorial integrity of the PRC, provides the legal foundation for this curricular intervention. Yet Hongkongers had developed a distinct civic identity prior to the handover, grounded in liberal-democratic values such as liberty, democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights—values

which are fundamentally at odds with the Chinese Communist Party's imperatives of loyalty, harmony, and conformity (Lo, 2008). By positioning “unification” as an overarching principle, the policy documents effectively subsume Hong Kong's pluralistic identity under a monolithic vision of Chinese nationalism.

The findings of this study also raise broader questions about the relationship between education and identity construction in contexts where competing forms of political belonging coexist. As the Hong Kong case demonstrates, curriculum discourse does not merely transmit knowledge; through linguistic strategies such as presupposition, deixis, and affective evaluation, it participates in defining legitimate forms of identification by foregrounding particular narratives of national membership while rendering alternative forms of belonging less visible. Similar processes of identity negotiation can be observed in exile communities, where educational institutions often serve as sites for maintaining collective memory, language practices, and alternative narratives of belonging (Coelho & Somayaji, 2022; Wong, 2026d). These contrasting educational spaces highlight the role of discourse in shaping how communities understand continuity, change, and political identity across territorial boundaries.

Future research could further investigate how students interpret and negotiate competing identity constructions in educational settings. In particular, comparative studies examining students educated under different curricular environments, such as those in Hong Kong and those in Hong Kong diaspora communities in the United Kingdom, may illuminate how institutional discourse interacts with individual experiences of belonging. Such research would extend understanding of how education functions not only as a mechanism of identity formation but also as a site where identities are contested, reproduced, and transformed.

AI Declaration

The author declares that ChatGPT was used only as assistive instruments during the preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, it was used to support language clarity, grammar, and formatting. ChatGPT did not generate, fabricate, or manipulate research data, analysis, interpretations, or references. All ChatGPT outputs were carefully reviewed, verified, and edited by the author, who takes full responsibility for the content of the manuscript. This use of ChatGPT complies with the Publication Ethics and Malpractice Statement of the *Journal of Pragmatics Research*.

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